



EBT WIRELESS PROJECT

August 09 Newsletter



DHS

From the Editor – Jan Walters

| Total Transactions | EBT Transactions | Total Sales on Wireless |
|---------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------|
| 2008 Total: 27,701 | 4257 (15.4% of total) | \$724,703 |
| 2009 Totals: | | |
| January 09 265 | 17 (6.4%) | \$14,678 |
| February 291 | 42 (14.4%) | \$23,494 |
| March 382 | 39 (10.2%) | \$26,075 |
| April 579 | 44 (7.6%) | \$28,492 |
| May 4134 | 448 (10.8%) | \$145,541 |
| June 3897 | 715 (18.3%) | \$92,723 |
| July 4299 | 1217 (28.3%) | \$74,445 |

July Facts:

- The number of EBT transactions and EBT sales for July are the highest than any other month since the Project began in 2005! This is outstanding!!
- EBT sales for July 09 were \$10,637 compared to \$6,683 for July 08. This is an increase of 59%
- EBT transactions for July 09 were 1217 compared to 810 in July 08. This is an increase of 50%
- Overall, total sales for July 09 of \$74,445 are 42.9% higher than July 08.
- Total transactions of 4299 are 18.8% higher than July 08.
- The average transaction amount for July 09 was \$17.32 compared to \$14.40 a year ago.

Year to date sales for 2009 are \$405,462 compared to \$317,098 from a year ago. This is an increase of 27.9%.

In July 2009, there were 141,279 Food Assistance/EBT families in Iowa. \$39.4 million in benefits were issued in July to these families.

Here are interesting facts regarding July sales:

There were 148 farmers/producers who were active during July. There were 109 of you who had EBT sales. The farmers who had 20 or more EBT transactions in July were:

- Scavo Market
- Storybook Orchard
- Iowa Orchard
- Barb's Garden & Pantry
- R & R Farms
- Rinehart Family Farm

- Circle W
- Grubby's Kettle Korn
- DeMoss Pumpkin Farm
- Havel Pork
- Tammy's Treasures
- Circle M Produce
- Stillwater Greenhouse
- Country Market
- Melon Shed
- Cortez Garden
- Neva's Countryside Products
- Ven Horst Family Market

Congratulations to Tammy Donovan/Country Market for having the highest number of EBT transactions (121) and the greatest amount of EBT sales. Country Market is located in the Sioux City area. Great job!

We have also noticed that those farmers that only sell in rural areas of the state are also having some EBT sales.

Equipment Issues & Responsibilities

Though Tracy and Jan have not been able to get out and visit the markets as much as we would like, the couple of markets that we have visited have shown that not all farmers are promptly reporting technical issues with the wireless device. (See new instructions below). We're still seeing a few problem areas. Some of you are coming to market without a charged battery or forget to bring the spare battery or left the signs at home, or forget to bring the machine to market.

We know how easy it is to forget a necessary item for the market. There was even a farmer who told us they forgot the money box for one market. Please help us by remembering to pack your equipment, extra battery, signage for market and the wireless device. Also, promptly report any equipment problem as soon as possible. We want to have your machine work, so you can accept EBT cards at the market.

EBT Payment Concern

A farmer in the Quad City area experienced a problem on Saturday, Aug. 8th. An EBT recipient attempted to purchase \$19 in food items. While the farmer processed the EBT card, they gave the customer the sack with their items in it. When it came time for the customer to enter their PIN, they refused. They indicated that they don't have to enter PIN numbers for other retailers. The farmer then asked for the sack of food items. The customer refused and walked off with the food items. The farmer did not get paid.

Advice: You may not want to give the customer the food until the transaction is approved and the receipt is printing.

In this case, the farmer may file a police report. DHS can also initiate a retailer adjustment. In this case, the farmer had the complete 19 digit EBT card number and the customer's telephone number. Remember: more information is always better.

A retailer adjustment will trigger a notice being sent to the EBT customer advising them of the situation and that the farmer wants to get paid. Once the adjustment is filed, a hold is placed on the funds to ensure that the farmer will get paid if no appeal is filed or if the appeal is in favor of the farmer. This is assuming that there are funds in the account. The EBT customer has 10 business days to file an appeal. If no appeal is filed, ACS will transfer the funds to the farmer's account. If an appeal is filed, the farmer may want to sit in on the teleconference and present their side of the situation. An Administrative Law judge will then make a decision on what is correct and make a decision accordingly. It is in the best interest of the farmer to have as much documentation as possible in these types of situations.

Shutting Down for the Winter 2009

Due to budget limitations, we are going to be persistent in shutting down machines for those of you who do not operate in a year round market or attend monthly winter markets. We will be looking at your annual sales, looking at your sales from last winter and then determine the cost effectiveness of keeping your machine live during the upcoming winter months.

When we mail you a closure form, it will be extremely important to return the signed closure forms to us. We will be looking at your individual situation before making a decision on when to close your account for the winter. **We must have a signed closure letter to mail to TMS to close down your account. If the closure form is not timely returned to us, you may not receive any reimbursement from DHS.**

More information will be coming in the next two months. If you have any questions about closing your account for the winter, contact Tracy or Jan.

Congratulations Julie and Scott Wilber - Boone

The Wilbers were the cover story of Iowa Farmer Today that was released Aug. 1st. The story brought out the fact that small farms have big potential. Scott was able to quit his off-the-farm job and now focuses his energies on their farm. There were a couple of great pictures of the Wilbers and their produce plants. The Wilber's joined the EBT Wireless project in 2006.

Congratulations Rufus & Jane Musser – Milton Creamery-Milton

Milton Creamery took the Blue Ribbon and top award in the Cheddar 12-24 month class with their Prairie Breeze at the American Cheese Societies Annual Conference & Competition. Milton Creamery is committed to the production of the best quality cheese possible with milk taken exclusively from Amish Farms in the Milton Iowa region, using grass feed milk when available. Prairie Breeze is the validation of the Mussers dream to build a business, neighbors helping their neighbors. The Musser's joined the EBT Wireless project in 2007.

New Instructions for Technical Assistance

DHS staff have assisted many of you over the past five years. As the Wireless Project has expanded and become a national model, DHS staff are fielding lots of questions and inquiries from other states, market managers and interested farmers. With staffing shortages and additional work on other projects, we needed to come up with an alternative solution to timely address your concerns and questions.

Tracy and Jan had a lengthy conversation with Kim Lyons of Merchant Source and Total Merchant Services (TMS) and have come up with the following solution:

- When you are experiencing an issue with your wireless machines, **the first step is to call TMS at 1-888-848-6825**. When prompted, you need to push 1. When prompted again, push 1 again to be connected with Tech Support. The first thing that you will need is your Merchant ID number. That number should be on the sticker on the side of your machine or on your billing statement. **If for some reason the person you are talking to you can't fix the problem, please ask to speak to Ray Rockwell**. Tracy has worked extensively for the past year with Ray and he knows our program very well and has worked hard to train the TMS tech support staff to better help Iowa farmers with any issue.
- If TMS does not help you fix the problem, then be sure to call Tracy or Jan right away.
- **If TMS tells you that your device needs to be replaced, call Tracy or Jan right away. There may be a replacement fee for the device. DHS wants the fee directly billed to us versus debited from your checking account.**

It is extremely important that you call TMS as soon as you realize that you are having a problem with your wireless machine. Your wireless machines need to be in working order at the Farmers Markets so that the Food Assistance population can purchase fresh, healthy food items from you.

Change in Contact Information

For the past few years, we've had a cell phone to use when staff are on the road, visiting markets, etc. Due to budget constraints, we have cancelled our cell phone coverage. If you were using the cell number (515-229-4641) to reach Tracy or Jan, please remove that number from your cell phone.

To reach staff during business hours: please dial:

Tracy Penick (7:30AM – 4:00PM) 515-281-5545

Jan Walters (8:30AM – 5:00PM) 515-281-3588

Remember if you have equipment problems, call TMS promptly!

Important: Check New Equipment Immediately

When TMS directly mails you a new device, we want you to check the power cord, download cord, and wireless device immediately to make sure everything works. We had a farmer receive a new device in the mail. The device worked and everything appeared fine. A week later, the farmer tried to charge his battery. He thought the charge worked. He quickly realized the battery was not charged. He brought the machine and cords to us. We discovered that the charge cord was defective. TMS gave us two choices, 1) return the entire machine and all the cords to them for a replacement 2) pay for the cost of a new power cord.

Neither choice was ideal. If we returned the machine to TMS, the farmer would have been without a device for about a week. We didn't want to pay for a power cord. Luckily, we came up with a work around for this one case. DHS staff will be checking the cords on machines that we handle. A new charger cord is approximately \$50.00. We want TMS to cover these costs and replace the equipment rather than DHS paying for the cost of the cords.

Duplicate Transactions

We have been receiving several phone calls from the farmers concerning duplicate transactions. When you run a transaction on your wireless machine and you are unsure whether it went or not here are a couple of things that you need to do.

- **First** look at the receipt and see if the transaction says APP or approved.
- If you are still unsure, then please **STOP** and batch out your wireless machine.
- If the transaction is **not** on your batch report then you will need to re-run the transaction.

We have seen several examples of farmer just re-running the transactions and therefore charging the customers twice. In order to fix the double charge, please call TMS at 1-888-848-6825, option 1, option 5, option 0 and they will work with you to reverse the extra charge.

Fix Coming for EBT Cards

Some of you have experienced problems with EBT cards. The most common complaint is that the cards can not be read when swiped through the wireless device. The magnetic stripe on Iowa's EBT cards is referred to as 'low coercivity or low-co'. When we implemented EBT in 2003, this was common on EBT cards. The magnetic stripes on low co cards are not as durable on the newer, more advanced cards. Due to the number of complaints from recipients and retailers, Iowa will be switching to a 'high coercivity or high-co' card around the end of August. The high-co cards are much more durable, making it more difficult to de-magnetize the EBT card. Other states that have switched to the 'high-co' cards, have noticed a huge reduction in the number of key-entered transactions.

In the meantime, if an EBT household's card doesn't swipe, you need to manually enter the card number and follow the prompts on the wireless device. There is no cost to you for manually entering an EBT card.

New Wireless Equipment – Model Verifone 8020

As our purchased Nurit 8000 equipment is aging and developing technical issues, we're starting to upgrade to the Verifone 8020. The Verifone company purchased the Nurit brand a year or so ago. The 8020 looks like the Nurit 8000 with some differences. The most noticeable difference is that the cover over the paper roll is 'blue' and the word 'Verifone' is on the equipment. The big difference is the battery. Call Tracy or TMS for instructions on how to remove the battery.

New DHS Staff for EBT Wireless Project

Kim Jones, a long time DHS employee, has been assigned to help Jan and Tracy with the EBT Wireless Project. Kim will be working closely with Tracy in closing down accounts for the winter months and reactivating the accounts for the spring 2010. We're glad she is joining us!

Upcoming Events

13th Annual Community Food Security Coalition Conference – October 10-13, 2009 at the Des Moines Convention Center. Their website is www.communityfoodconference.org. We've been selected to present information about the EBT Wireless Project.

Farm Bureau Annual Conference – Des Moines Convention Center December 2nd & 3rd, 2009. More information coming.

Des Moines Downtown Winter Season Markets – Des Moines is holding their indoor/outdoor markets at Capital Square/Nollen Plaza; the same as previous years. The dates are November 20th & 21st, and Dec. 18th & 19th. The Friday lunch market will be from 11AM-2PM. For more information contact: Kelly Foss (515-286-4928) or Molly Kotval (286-4911) if you're interested in selling at this market.

Customer Survey Results for 2009

The customer survey response so far is phenomenal! Just a reminder, please put the cards in the sack of any customer, **especially** those who use a plastic card for payment. We've had many responses from customers who paid with cash. The comments are interesting, but we really want feedback from those who are using plastic (EBT, debit or credit). If you need more cards, contact Tracy. Here are the results so far:

- Why do you like to shop at farmers markets? (Top reasons in descending order)
 - Good/fresh food (91)
 - Fresh Produce (75)
 - Buy locally grown/made items (48)
 - Support local farmers (33)
 - It's Fun/relaxed atmosphere/music (17)
- How often do you shop at farmers markets?
 - Every week – 54%
 - Every 2 weeks – 13%
 - Once or twice a month – 10%
 - More than once a week – 9%
 - As much as I can – 4%
 - 3 out of 4 weeks – 3%
 - As much as I can (3%)
 - Other (4%)
- What markets do you shop at? (Top 5 responses thus far)
 - Davenport (Northpark & Freight House) - 62
 - Des Moines (Downtown, Drake, Valley Junction) - 28
 - IA City - 27
 - Cedar Rapids – 20
 - Burlington - 14
- What did you buy today at the market? (Top 7 in descending order)
 - Fresh produce - 166
 - Baked goods - 118
 - Vegetable plants/fruit bushes/trees - 30
 - Flowers – 28
 - Honey/Jam & jelly – 27
 - Meat – 24
 - Eggs - 9
- What would you like to buy but can't find at the market? (in descending order)
 - Eggs - 7
 - More Fruit - 7
 - Parsnips - 3

- Lots of other things, such as (goat milk, fresh juice, shrimp, eggplant, arts & crafts, etc)
- If a year round market was in your area, would you shop at it during the winter months?
(Apparently, the question should have specified 'an indoor' year round market. Many customers are assuming that its outside and no produce will be available.)
 - Yes – 74.8%
 - No – 14.5%
 - No answer – 6.6%
 - Depends or already have indoor year-round market – 4.1%
- What services could the market offer or provide that would make you shop there more often? (in descending order)
 - Restrooms - 49
 - Hand washing stations -35
 - Canning/freezing classes - 22
 - Chairs/sitting areas to relax & eat goodies – 7
 - Others (incl. shade, more variety, music, cooking demos, garbage cans, etc) - 17
- How did you pay for your items today?
 - Cash –62%
 - Credit – 14.7%
 - Debit – 11.8%
 - EBT – 10.4%
 - Other (senior checks/checks) – 1.1%

Additional comments from customers:

- Muscatine – sometimes I can get things a lot less at the super market
- Mt. Vernon – is an excellent market. I'm a lover of fresh fruit pies & veggies. Especially Cindy's pies. I just moved here & love the stuff.
- IA City EBT – Thank you for making EBT purchases possible at our farmers markets. I found 4 vendors today who accepted EBT.
- IA City – Please consider a year round market
- Sioux City EBT – I love the farmers' markets & want them to stay around.
- Webster City – Keep up the good work
- Davenport – Don't like the presence of so many dogs at downtown market. So near the food.
- Enjoy seeing what God has blessed so many of the vendors with
- Bettendorf – Doesn't the state of Iowa have bigger things to deal with?
- Coralville EBT – the market has gotten so small. Not as much variety anymore. Parking is a problem in downtown IA City.
- IA City EBT – I'd visit the farmers market more often if I had a car
- IA City EBT – Thank you for making it possible to use the EBT card at farmers markets
- Mason City EBT – Have stuff like you have for the older people, but for the disabled.
(Refers to Senior FMNP)
- EBT customer – I think it's great that some vendors participate in EBT/WIC program.
- Muscatine – Keep having the markets. Need lower prices. I live on Social Security.

Cost of Wireless Equipment

Just a reminder. If you lose the wireless device, there is a \$750 replacement cost. Total Merchant Services will deduct this amount from your checking account. If the device is stolen, be sure to contact your insurance agent to see if a claim can be filed. Insurance may pay for all or part of the replacement costs.

Helpful Hints!

We have received a few calls from farmers indicating that their new wireless machine keeps shutting off by itself. Here is how to turn off the batter saver:

- Get to Credit Sale page
- Hit the red colored 'Menu cancel' key
- The machine may tell you to enter Password. Remember; the password is always the current date mm/dd/yyyy or 06192009, Hit enter after entering the date
- You will now see the 'Menu Screen'. Press '3' Merchant Options
- Now press '5' for Battery Saver
- Now press '1' to turn the Battery Saver off.
- The machine will now ask 'Are you sure? Hit enter for Yes.
- Now you're done! The machine will stay on until you shut it off.
Hit Menu Cancel to return to the Credit Sale screen.

Loading Paper – We have also received a few calls from farmers stating that the receipts aren't printing. Please check to see how you have loaded the paper. The paper must always feed up from the bottom. Make sure the plastic cover over the paper is firmly closed. If you have further problems with this, call TMS (the 888 number is on the side of your machine.)

Important Information on Turning Off Your Machine!

If you decide to turn off your wireless machines, it is extremely important that you contact Tracy first, not Total Merchant Services (TMS). The EBT Wireless Program is a special program and therefore the closure forms **HAVE** to come through us. If you contact TMS directly, you may incur the \$295 early termination fee. We have had two farmers go directly to TMS and one of the farmers even sent the State of Iowa owned equipment back to TMS and it cannot be retrieved. The same farmer also threw away our signs. Because of these actions, the farmer has been billed for the loss State of Iowa equipment. If you have any questions on this issue, please contact Tracy.

Reminders:

1. Since we have so many new farmers, remember that you cannot ring up a sale for another vendor. You could lose your Food Stamp certification and be terminated from the Wireless Project.
2. Since you are paying for the commercial transaction fees, be sure to keep track of what you are paying so you can use those expenses as a tax deduction.
3. You cannot set a minimum purchase amount. If an EBT household wishes to purchase \$.50 in onions, you do need to process the transaction. Same for any debit or credit transaction.

4. If your machine quits working, be sure to call Jan or Tracy right away! Or if need help during the weekend, you can call the 888 phone number on the side of your machine.
5. Let us know if you need any supplies such as paper rolls, power cords, or battery.
6. The second battery that we provide to you was purchased by DHS. If you ever need to return your wireless machine, be sure to keep one battery, carrying case and signs. We will pick them up from you.
7. **Charge your batteries before market.** You should always have a charged battery, ready to go for market. If a battery is not holding a charge, contact Tracy for a replacement.
10. Please make sure to keep the original box that your machine came in as it contains the Sim card, which is needed to identify your machine if you have to call TMS.

Help Desk

We are here to help you!

When you have questions about:

- **Participating in the Wireless project or reimbursement questions? Call Tracy Penick at 515-281-5545 or Jan Walters at 515-281-3588.**
- **What you can sell to EBT customers, or being authorized to accept EBT? Call FNS at 515-284-4035.**
- **Food Assistance eligibility? Call Char Hansen at 515-281-6820.**